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# Using National History to Construct the Boundaries of Citizenship: An Analysis of Greek Citizens' Discourse About Immigrants' Rights

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In this article we advance a qualitative approach to study the interconnection between representations of history and representations of citizenship. We argue that representations of the national past are important resources on which different constructions of citizenship are based. Our empirical context is the heated debate that emerged as a result of the announcement of new citizenship legislation in Greece. We used the online comments posted in the forum of the Ministry of Internal Affairs following the announcement of the legislation to study how national history was represented by Greek citizens and how these representations functioned to form different arguments regarding migrants' citizenship rights. Our analysis identified 4 themes in representations of national history: continuity of the nation, idealization of the past, moral obligation toward the past, and homogeneity or heterogeneity of the nation. We show that these ideas largely sustain an exclusive, essentialist, ethnic conception of the nation as a distinct, homogeneous, and continuous entity of people sharing a common genetic heritage. More inclusive arguments were based on seemingly pluralistic ideas that implicitly entailed banal nationalist assumptions or assimilatory ideas toward migrant inclusion. We conclude that commentators' historical representations inhibit critical understanding of the past and consequently of a more open and plural understanding of the future. Future research should focus on examining how formal and informal education may promote such representations and on the political implications of these for intergroup relations in multicultural contexts.

*Keywords:* history, representations, nation, citizenship, migrants

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In contemporary political debates in Europe there is an increased "historization" of national citizenship (Smeekes, 2014). Politicians stress the need for both migrants and indigenous citi-

zens to gain more knowledge of the national heritage of their country of residence, claiming that this will lead to much-needed community cohesiveness in today's globalized societies

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(Duyvendak, 2011). But although this “historical rooting of national citizenship” (Smeekes, 2014, p. 8) is advocated as a political imperative, little is known about how people’s representations of the national past relate to their perceptions of citizenship. In this article, we investigate the ways in which representations of a nation’s past guide people’s ways of defining citizenship. We argue that these representations are the basis on which to build different constructions of citizenship and argue about the inclusion or exclusion of migrants, having thus important implications for cohesiveness and harmonious coexistence in multicultural societies.

The social debates around citizenship legislation, or in other terms, the ways that people themselves negotiate citizenship, particularly in relation to migrant rights (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011), is an important, yet understudied field of research in the social sciences (Condor, 2011). Existing research has shown that different representations of citizenship are associated with different attitudes toward migrants (Meeus, Duriez, Vanbeselaere, & Boen, 2010; Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet, & Duriez, 2013) and that debates over criteria of citizenship reflect ideas about the boundaries of national identities, designate what is appropriate polity membership (Gibson & Hamilton, 2011), and determine whether migrants are worthy or unworthy of it (Andreouli & Howarth, 2013; Gray & Griffin, 2014). Yet more research is needed to examine the ideas on which citizenship representations are built; the content of these representations; and the ways this content is mobilized in the social arena, in the relations between indigenous and migrants. We suggest that historical representations are important building blocks of citizenship conceptions.

AQ: 3 History has recently attracted the interest of social psychologists (Condor, 1996; Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2012; Wertsch, 1997). The majority of studies have focused on the strong interconnection between historical representations and identity (e.g., Condor, 1996; Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001; Wertsch, 2002). Although there is increasing research experimentally investigating how specific historical narratives mediate attitudes toward migrants and ethnic groups (e.g., Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe,

2011), there are few studies that have examined the ways in which the historical past is represented and mobilized to make particular claims by citizens themselves with regard to societal arrangements and debates (e.g., Kus, Liu, & Ward, 2013).

In this research we take as our empirical context the heated debates surrounding the announcement of new citizenship legislation in 2010 in Greece, in times of intense social economic and political upheaval. The legislation was considered a turning point in the design of immigration policy in Greece, because it disrupted a long history of an ethnic “*ius sanguinis*” (right of blood) conception of citizenship in the Greek context (Anagnostou, 2011; Christopoulos, 2013). To study these debates, we chose the online forum created by the Ministry of Internal affairs following the announcement of the legislation. In examining these debates, we asked (a) In which ways is the historical past represented in the context of debates about citizenship rights in the Greek context? and (b) How do these representations of the historical past function to define citizenship and support arguments of inclusion or exclusion of migrants from citizenship rights? In other words, we studied how history mediates the present, how it is used as a resource for constructing the meanings and boundaries of Greek citizenship in the context of contemporary debates.

In what follows, we outline our theoretical approach to the study of history and citizenship, and we review literature that examines the political implications of historical representations and research that examines the ways in which historical representations mediate attitudes toward migrants. Identifying the limitations of existing literature, we argue for the need for a qualitative approach to the study of the ways that history mediates citizenship representations. We then outline some important dimensions of the Greek context regarding citizenship and history, before we move on to present our methodology and analysis.

### Studying History and Citizenship “in Action”

Our theoretical standpoint stems from the theory of social representations, which theorizes the ways that people construct knowledge about the social world and the ways they use it to

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position themselves and mediate their communication and their relations with others ([Moscovici, 1961/2008](#)). The social representations framework is particularly concerned with the workings of common sense in contexts of social change, when meanings become politicized ([Elchereth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011](#)). Existing research has shown that social representations of citizenship, race, ethnicity, and culture are central in understanding the politics of inclusion and exclusion in contemporary societies ([Howarth, 2006, 2009](#); [Howarth, Wagner, Magnusson, & Sammut, 2014](#); [Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015](#)). It is thus a suitable framework to study this context, namely: “lay” reasoning about politics, particularly about polity membership or citizenship and its implications at a time when this issue is particularly salient in the public sphere.

Existing research on citizenship has called for approaches that focus on citizenship “in action,” namely, studying the ways in which citizenship is constructed and mobilized by citizens themselves in everyday life ([Di Masso, 2012](#); [Dixon, Levine, & McAuley, 2006](#); [Haste, 2004](#); [Shotter, 1993](#)) as opposed to a state-centered study of citizenship as an institution (e.g., [Joppke, 2010](#); [Marshall, 1950](#)). There has currently been scant research focusing on how citizenship is constructed and negotiated by social actors and on the functions of these constructions in relation to migrant rights and entitlements. This research has shown that lay representations of citizenship function as resources designating who is worthy or unworthy of citizenship entitlements and building arguments for or against the inclusion of migrants ([Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2014](#); [Gibson & Hamilton, 2011](#); [Gray & Griffin, 2014](#); [Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015](#)). In this article, we are interested in studying the interconnection of history and citizenship from a lay citizen’s perspective.

Although history has not been under systematic focus in psychological literature, existing literature has emphasized the strong link between historical representations and identity. Historical representations are central in constructing and sustaining an imagined community ([Anderson, 1983](#)), in providing social groups with an idea of origin and future trajectory ([Liu & Hilton, 2005](#)), in positioning in the world of nations ([Billig, 1995](#)), in providing an identity permeated with morals and values ([Ger-](#)

[gen, 2005](#)), and in creating a sense of timelessness ([Reicher & Hopkins, 2001](#); [Sani, Bowe, & Herrera, 2008](#)). Existing literature has also underscored the political dimension of historical narratives. They have forged particular forms of “national consciousness” in given sociopolitical contexts ([Hilton, Erb, Dermot, & Molian, 1996](#)), and they sustain and reproduce the nation-state ([Hobsbawm, 1992](#); [Wertsch, 1997](#)). In times of sociopolitical change and turmoil, the significance and relevance of past events to the present is contested ([Liu & Hilton, 2005](#); [Reicher & Hopkins, 2001](#)). History is reconstructed and mobilized to serve certain political ends ([Papadakis, 2008](#); [Tileagă, 2009](#)), leading to competing representations of the same historical events ([Papadakis, 2008](#); [Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012](#); [Triandafyllidou, 1998](#)). Because historical representations are crucial in defining positions of self and other within and between national groups and have clear political implications, we argue that they are important building blocks of citizenship conceptions.

In this article, we are interested specifically in the ways in which history is mobilized by citizens themselves to construct representations of citizenship. We thus argue that there is a need to study what [Gibson \(2015, p. 217\)](#) called “history in action,” namely the use of history representations as a resource for lay people’s thinking and arguing about social issues, such as citizenship. To our knowledge there is little research that has done that. [Kus et al. \(2013\)](#) showed, in the context of relations between Russians and Estonians in Estonia, how history becomes an argumentative resource for both groups. It is used to understand the present and to make claims about the legitimacy of the status quo of the groups. Focusing on the level of political parties, [Mols and Jetten \(2014\)](#) showed how historical representations are used by populist right-wing parties to legitimize opposition to immigration in their countries. This research has shown that history can become an important resource in arguing and thinking about societal arrangements and relations. In our case, we examine the specific historical representations that are drawn upon in constructing citizenship boundaries in debates over citizenship rights to migrants.

With regard to immigration debates, a few researchers have recently turned to the experimental study of the ways in which historical

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representations mediate attitudes toward the rights of other ethnic and religious groups and immigrants in different social contexts. Sibley and colleagues ([Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008](#)) examined whether historical negation in contrast to historical recognition of past injustices, in the intergroup context of Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand, affected attitudes toward bicultural policy and distribution of resources. In the English context, [Jetten and Wohl \(2012\)](#) argued that representations of historical continuity in contrast to those of discontinuity led to the expression of opposition to immigration. In another series of experimental studies, [Smeekes and colleagues \(Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2015; Smeekes et al., 2011; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2012\)](#) manipulated different aspects of historical representations (i.e., continuity or discontinuity, history rooted in Christianity or history of religious tolerance or intolerance) and examined how these representations led to opposition of Dutch people toward Muslims' rights and opportunities to express and confirm their identity in public.

These different studies suggested that the degree that historical representations affect present attitudes is mediated by people's strength of national identification ([Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Smeekes et al., 2011](#)), their feelings of continuity and threat of the ingroup ([Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014](#)), and their perceived compatibility with the outgroup ([Smeekes et al., 2011](#)). Overall, they have provided solid evidence that representations of history affect the ways that groups perceive other ethnic, religious, and migrant groups; how legitimate they consider the distribution of resources in a society; and whether they oppose the expression of rights of these groups.

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Although the experimental nature of these studies permits one to draw safe causal links between historical representations and attitudes, there are certain limitations that we wish to overcome by opting for a qualitative naturalistic approach in this article. First, in experimental research historical representations are reduced to specific binary narrative forms: continuous or discontinuous, tolerant or intolerant, rooted in Christianity or not. Although these may indeed be aspects of historical narratives in different contexts, people usually encounter, learn, reconstruct, and use representations of history in

multiple, complex, and dilemmatic ways ([Billig, 1987](#)). A qualitative approach permits one to unravel this complexity in people's formation of social representations.

Second, the argumentative context of the experiments is artificial: People are asked to participate in a condition that promotes a particular view of historical representation and to express their attitudes toward certain issues regarding other groups. Thus, both the narratives and the social issues are externally set and do not necessarily reflect participants' own appropriation of history or their own concerns toward a social issue. In this article, the naturalistic qualitative approach permits us to give prominence to the views of individuals themselves and examine the multiple ways that history is invoked, used, and argued upon in a concrete debate (about Greek citizenship) that puts at stake the meanings of Greek identity. In the following section, we provide details of the social context of this debate.

### Background to the Study: Representations of Greek History and Citizenship

Studies on Greek national identity ([Triandafyllidou, 1998; Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002](#)) have suggested that since the national independence of 1821, Greek identity has been defined in ethno-cultural terms, with reference to common ancestry, tradition, and Christian Orthodox religion. This strong ethno-cultural conception of nationhood is reflected in the history education curricula of the country ([Frangoudaki & Dragona, 1997](#)), in debates about Greek education ([Tzanelli, 2006](#)), and also in the country's citizenship legislation.

Since the 19th century, when the modern Greek state was instituted, Greek citizenship has been predominantly defined in "ius sanguinis" terms, namely criteria of ancestry ([Anagnostou, 2011](#)). The Greek term used to refer to citizenship *ithagenia* contains the word *genos*, which refers to descent or generation, and as [Christopoulos \(2013\)](#) noted, *genos* was originally used as a term to describe the Greek Orthodox population of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, the term that denotes citizenship reflects itself the ethno-cultural content of Greek national identity ([Christopoulos, 2013](#)).

The year 2010 is considered a turning point in immigration policy and citizenship legislation



AQ: 8 in Greece. From “a view [of] Greek citizenship as a right to be exclusively reserved for those who ethnically belong to the cherished national community” (Anagnostou, 2011, p. 2), the new legislation turned to “jus soli” (right of soil) criteria. The new legislation retained many legal criteria for citizenship acquisition of the previous legislations; however, it also contained provisions that significantly extended migrants’ rights. Specifically, children whose parents were born and resided legally in Greece could automatically acquire citizenship, and those not born in Greece could acquire citizenship provided they completed 6 years of schooling and their parents resided legally in Greece for 5 years. Finally, people of ethnic Greek descent and nonethnic Greeks who were not citizens of Greece but complied with certain age and residence requirements were given for the first time the right to vote and be elected.<sup>1</sup>

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Coinciding with an unprecedented economic, social, and political crisis, the new legislation evoked heated public (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015) and political (Figgou, 2016; Gropas, Kouki, & Triandafyllidou, 2011) debate. Examination of public debates around citizenship legislation have focused on the ways in which lay actors, both immigrants and Greeks, negotiate the meanings of citizenship and construct representations of citizenship based on different ethnic, cultural, and civic criteria. These civic, ethnic, and cultural conceptions of citizenship can be strategically formulated and deployed in order to advance claims for or against the naturalization of migrants (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015).

In the political arena, research has demonstrated the strong opposition by the conservative and extreme right-wing parties, who asked for stricter criteria and a public referendum (Figgou, 2016). According to Gropas et al. (2011), the parliamentary debates juxtaposed the ethnic and the civic view of the national community, and “in this juxtaposition, the role of references to history and us/them categorizations are crucial semantic tools to put forward the competing arguments of the political parties” (Gropas et al., 2011, p. 18). Parties of the broader left of the political spectrum advanced an inclusive conception of the nation and used historical references to support this. For example, they referred to Rigas Feraios, a prominent figure of the Greek Independence and Enlight-

enment movements of the 19th century whose vision of the nation resembled a civic conceptualization of citizenship, and to the Greek refugees from Asia Minor who were granted Greek citizenship during 1927–1929. On the other end, conservative parties supported an exclusive, ethnic conception of citizenship, drawing a firm distinction between “Us” (pure Greeks) and “Them” (nonethnic Greeks), arguing that ethnic Greeks, such as Pontians,<sup>2</sup> would be offended by a legislation that grants the same rights to ethnic and nonethnic Greeks (Gropas et al., 2011).

In this context of the debate we turn our attention away from the political arena to the citizens’ perspective on citizenship and particularly examine how they have employed history to demarcate the boundaries of citizenship: who is to be included or excluded and on what grounds.

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## Method

The data were collected from the large pool of comments published in the online forum created by the Greek Ministry of Internal Affairs (<http://www.opengov.gr/types/?p=327>) following this announcement of the legislation: “Current Provisions for Greek Citizenship, the Political Participation of Repatriated Greeks and Lawfully Resident Immigrants and Other Provisions.” This online space was created for public deliberation before the legislation was directed to the parliament to be voted. Both migrants and Greeks commented, but comments by Greek citizens largely outnumbered those of migrants.<sup>3</sup> A total of 3,354 comments were posted by Greek citizens in this virtual context, between the 29th of December 2009 and the 7th of January 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2011, the State Council, Greece’s supreme administrative court, called for amendments of the legislation based on the argument that it violated the Greek constitution. Specifically, it questioned the constitutionality of the right to vote and be elected for nonethnic Greeks and of the criteria for second-generation immigrants, on the basis that they did not ensure migrants’ strong bonds to the nation. In 2015 a new amended law was passed by the Greek parliament.

<sup>2</sup> A group that lived in the region of the Black Sea and in Northern Anatolia in Turkey and spoke a Pontian Greek dialect, distinct from the Greek language, but were considered to have ethnic Greek origin.

<sup>3</sup> We estimated that only 49 comments out of the 3,403 were written by migrants. Our estimation is based on the ways that commentators introduced themselves and signed their posts.

During the last decade, using Internet forums as sites for data collection has become popular in psychology (Holtz, Kronberger, & Wagner, 2012). Virtual environments are recommended when researchers want to gather naturalistic data, which have resulted without the researcher's interference and influence (Hine, 2000; Holtz & Wagner, 2009). Participants exchange views without the inhibitions evoked in face-to-face interactions, covered by the relative anonymity of these forums. However, the lack of sociodemographic and other important information of participants (e.g., political orientation) should restrict claims of representativeness of the population studied (Holtz et al., 2012) and lead to a more in-depth contextualized understanding of the particular forum analyzed. In our case, participants in the forum were people who had Internet access, were linguistically proficient to comment, and were informed about the possibility of commenting. Judging from the way comments were written, commentators appeared to be people who were strongly motivated to express their views, either for or against the legislation and the government, with the majority being against the proposed legislation.

AQ: 11 To construct the analytical corpus of comments, we followed a purposive sampling procedure (Flick, 2009), according to which, after reading all 3,354 comments written by Greek citizens, we selected those that made reference to national history (i.e., any reference to events, figures, eras of the country's past). This process resulted in a total of 334 comments. We further refined our selection by excluding (a) repetitions of the same comments posted; (b) references to knowledge of history as a criterion for citizenship acquisition (because we thought they did not specifically represent the national past but instead just argued that it should be part of citizens' education); (c) comments whose only historical reference was the phrase of former Prime Minister Papandreou (i.e., "Greece belongs to Greeks") without any other references to the past; and (d) unspecified references to the historical past through, for example, the use of a single word or parts of a phrase that are well known but without any further elaboration. Once we completed this process, our final analytical corpus consisted of 250 com-

ments. The length of the comments varied from a few lines to a few pages long. Although there was some interaction in the forum, with commentators responding to each other, most of the comments were stand-alone, so our analysis was conducted on the basis of individual comments.

Having identified the variety of the historical eras, events, and figures that commentators referred to, we proceeded to thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001) of the 250 comments, mapping out the content of the comments related to history. Following standard principles of thematic analysis, we developed a scheme of descriptive codes to categorize the content of the comments, grouping them together into these broader and more abstract themes: continuity of the nation, idealization of the past, moral obligation toward the past, and homogeneity or heterogeneity of the nation. We subsequently examined, for each of the four themes of representations, the specific ways that history was used as an argumentative resource (Gibson, 2015) to construct arguments in relation to citizenship rights.

For the purposes of this analysis, we selected eight comments that illustrate most clearly the different themes we identified concerning the ways that the nation's past was represented. We present the comments under the names that participants used to sign them and in the same format (e.g., paragraphing, capital or small letters) as in the online deliberation, occasionally using brackets for our insertion of explanatory text. Where it was necessary for the analysis, we retained the original Greek term used by the commentator and explained its translation. The responsible agents provided consent for the use and publication of the data.<sup>4</sup>

### Using History to Construct Citizenship Boundaries

Participants referred to different eras and events of Greek history in their comments. The events and historical periods that they referred to most and in more detail were the 1821 War of

<sup>4</sup> Consent to process the material published in the forum was provided by the National Centre of Public Administration and the Greek license Creative Commons.

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AQ: 13 Independence against the Ottoman Empire, the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe (the last phase of the Greco-Turkish War during 1918–1922), the ancient era, and the period of the Greek Junta (1967–1974). Some of these events and eras are featured as we present the different themes (continuity of the nation, idealization of the past, moral obligation toward the past, and homogeneity or heterogeneity of the nation) that we identified in the ways that commentators formulated representations of the national past. These themes are ways of forming representations of the past to make sense of citizenship in the present. We illustrate each through relevant comments and focus on the ways that each of these themes functions to support different inclusive or exclusive arguments regarding citizenship rights for migrants.

**Continuity.** As Gergen (2005) noted, historical narratives are conventionally ordered in a linear temporal sequence, from past to present. The idea of continuity of the nation has also been identified in school history national narratives (Carretero, 2011). In our data, references to the historical past recurrently alluded to the idea of the continuity of the nation, from different points of the historical past until the present. Continuity was often presented as being established against obstacles, such as consecutive wars for the sovereignty of the nation, a finding that resonates with Fragoudaki and Dragona's (1997) findings about history representations in Greek schoolbooks. In Dimitris's comment that follows, the nation is presented as continuous through a series of important historical events:

Ancient Greek Civilization

Byzantium

Fn5 Greek revolution<sup>5</sup>

World Wars

Balkan Wars

Fn6 Civil war<sup>6</sup>

Fn7 Polytechnio<sup>7</sup>

All this history. All this blood from Greeks for this place that is called Greece, and you are now trying to batter it all away. (Dimitris Apostolou)

By referring to these landmarks of national history, Dimitris established the idea of the his-

torical continuity of the nation, starting from ancient times and leading up to contemporary Greek history. The specific references made reveal a teleological understanding of history (van Alphen & Carretero, 2015), in which all eras and continuous struggles against both internal (i.e., Polytechnio, civil war) and external (e.g., world wars) enemies are presented as having the inherent goal of reaching today's sovereign Greece. Dimitris's last phrase demonstrates a sense of pride associated with the nation's history. The phrase *All this history* alludes to the richness and significance of Greek history just summarized. This sense of pride is intensified by Dimitris's argument that whatever important achievements the nation has made is now put at stake by granting citizenship to migrants. In Dimitris's last words it is thus implied that migrants compromise the national sovereignty that was so hard to achieve. This idea was frequently evoked in the online forum (e.g., migrants were presented as allying with the enemy or acting against the country's interest). Greek history is further represented as a national possession (Condor, 2006): Historical struggles are presented as leading to this "place called Greece," and thus "all this history" is Greek. Reference to blood (i.e., "all this blood") makes explicit a presumed congruity between Greek history, Greek territory, and Greek ethnicity. It serves to establish a biological connection between Greeks over the passage of time (cf. Malkki, 1992). Thus, the nation's continuity is established in terms of both its people, who have been undoubtedly Greek, and its territory, which has remained unchanged, continuously through these eras. In this uninterrupted and unquestionably Greek context migrants have no place. In fact, a moral judgment is made that positions Greeks as heroes and migrants as villains. In this context, citizenship for migrants would constitute an act of disrespect toward Greek ancestors who sacrificed themselves for the benefit of contemporary Greeks.

<sup>5</sup> Against the Ottoman empire (1821–1832).

<sup>6</sup> Between the Greek government army, backed by the West, and the communist Democratic Army of Greece (1946–1949).

<sup>7</sup> The name of the university in Athens that serves as a symbol of the student movement against dictatorship in the late 1960s to early 1970s.



In the following comment, Ioannis also brings forward this idea of continuity of the nation through a reference to his family's interconnection with the country's history:

My grandfather served 13 years in the war in 1920, my father fought 3 years in the front 1946–1949. My origin is the following: father year of birth 1920, grandfather year of birth 1890. He fought 1910–13 years and found himself in *kokkini milia* [name of location in Greece] and he had a three year leave from the war. I, who am my grandfather's great grandchild have the same rights in this place with the African, the Pakistani, the Afghan, the Albanian, the African. I DEMAND THAT THE GREEK ITHAGENEIA [CITIZENSHIP] IS TAKEN BY WHOEVER HAS THE SAME ORIGIN AS ME. (Ioannis)

Ioannis started his comment with a reference to his grandfather's and his father's war service. The quote shows, on the one hand, the idea of national continuity, and on the other, the idea of ethnicized nationhood. The two are intimately interconnected. Ioannis's detailed reference to his family's war service and the sovereignty of the nation is used to show the interconnection of the nation's history and the history of his family. The argument that his ancestors sacrificed themselves to protect the sovereignty of the nation allows Ioannis to construct citizenship rights as a property of those who have the same origin, the blood-related descendants of those who fought for the nation, that is, himself, but not migrants. Ioannis perceives a series of specific ethnic and national groups as migrants, whom he mentions somewhat dismissively. These are chosen here because they probably represent the ones considered most impoverished or disadvantaged in Greek society, an idea that implicitly helps Ioannis reject their disputed entitlement to citizenship. His personal entitlement to citizenship is claimed powerfully, through the use of the word *demand* and the use of capital letters. Ioannis thus constructs an ethnic representation of citizenship, one that is based on common Greek descent.

Establishing continuity of the nation has been recognized in the literature as fulfilling a psychological need of self-transcendence (Sani et al., 2008). Indeed, as Billig (1992) showed, people use national symbols (e.g., royalty) as symbols of national continuity in the face of an unknown and changing future. However, beyond fulfilling a psychological need, continuity can mediate perceptions and attitudes toward outgroups. Although it is known that increased

perceived collective continuity has been associated with more opposition to immigrant rights (Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014), our research further reveals the semantic content of representations that serves to establish continuity and the ways that this content is put forward in establishing argumentatively the opposition toward immigrants.

These comments exemplify how this continuity is constructed and how it leads to opposition to citizenship rights for migrants. Specifically, in both these comments, continuity of the nation is represented as being established through overcoming obstacles, that is, wars and struggles for the sovereignty of the nation. Implicitly, both commentators link the continuity of the nation to biological factors, through reference to either the blood shed by Greeks or to their family's participation in these struggles over sovereignty. Migrants are presented as a threat to the continuity and the sovereignty of the nation, and the right to citizenship is thus preserved for ethnic Greeks.

**Idealization of the past.** The description of the historical past in the comments was often accompanied by implicit or explicit expression of pride and admiration. This was observed in Dimitri's reference to "all that history" and in Ioannis's detailed reference to his ancestors' service in important wars of Greek history. This pride and admiration is particularly evident in references to the ancient era. Commentators extensively alluded to famous figures, politicians, and philosophers of the ancient era (e.g., Aristotle, Plato, Thucydides, Pericles), whose importance they presented as undisputable and whose vision and ideals modern Greeks should respect and follow. These comments are permeated by an idealization of the historical past, which is contrasted to the present-day *decline*—what in Gergen's terms is a *regressive* narrative (Gergen, 2005). This idea of negative progress from past to present has also been noted in other contexts (i.e., Billig, 1992; Condor, 2006; van Alphen & Carretero, 2015). With regard to migration, Mols and Jetten (2014) showed how a representation of the past in glorious terms in opposition to a present decline and a bleak future can be used to legitimize anti-immigrant positions.

In several comments there was a reference to ancient Athens and particularly to the idea of the "metic" (explained later), a reference that was used mainly to support arguments against

granting citizenship to migrants. The following comment is an example:

Even in ancient Athens at the time when it was an exemplar city-state (that we use constantly as an example) there was a clear distinction between Athenian citizens and those who came from other cities but concentrated in it [Athens], in order to enjoy [its] glamour and economic development. The metics as they called them, did not originate from there [ancient Athens], they lived within the borders of the city-state but they usually had limited or no political rights. Political rights in Athens were given only in special circumstances but even in those cases they could become PEOPLE WITH EQUAL DUTIES-, but not CITIZENS. This was the protection of the system, since the foreigner could not participate in the decisions of the City Council or claim some sort of political power. With regard to financial assistance on the part of the Athenian democracy toward noncitizens it was probably nonexistent, since they were not entitled to a wage. On the contrary, there existed economic duties of the metics toward the city, like the metikion [type of taxation specific to metics], which was part of the official revenues of the state or the theorika [type of taxation], for the wealthy metics. And all this applied to Greeks of other cities, everyone else was simply . . . “barbarian.” (Filakismenos)

In this comment, the commentator, signing as “imprisoned” in Greek, presents the political organization of the Athenian city-state as having “glamour” and being economically developed. He suggests that contemporary Greece should take lessons from this historic past and use the Athenian polity as a template for political organization with regard to the distribution of rights to citizens and noncitizens. This comment makes reference to the Athenian metic system, whereby full citizens (who were Athenian by descent) were differentiated from the so-called metics, who were residents without enjoying full citizenship rights. What the commentator basically suggests is to give restricted rights to migrants, rights that do not permit them to participate in decisions of the state while at the same time having economic obligations toward the state. By using the ancient Athenian city-state as an exemplar to follow, he idealizes the past: It is a past that we are proud of and “we use constantly as an example.” Similar ideas are to be found in Greek historiography. As Liakos (2001, p. 30–31) noted, “Classical antiquity was also projected as the ideal model for the organization of a modern society.” Filakismenos closed his comment by calling pejoratively “barbarian” all those people who did not belong to the city, the foreigners.

The word was put in quotes because it comes from the often-used historical quote “Whoever is not Greek is barbarian,” the origin of which is disputed.<sup>8</sup> The term *barbarian* and the quote it comes from are commonly used to express the superiority of the Greek nation vis-à-vis other nations. What the commentator achieves through the use of this term is to conflate “barbarians” with migrants.

As van Alphen and Carretero (2015) noted, idealization of the past leads to perceiving the past as a moral example to follow in the present. Thus, ideas about idealization are complemented by ideas of moral obligation that one subsequently examines.

**Moral obligation.** Morality is a recognized feature of historical narratives. Gergen (2005) has suggested that historical narratives construct a moral status for the actors involved in the story. Studies on history education reveal that students’ historical narratives contain a positive moral judgment and legitimization of the national group actions (Lopez, Carretero, & Rodríguez-Moneo, 2014). In our data, the idealization of the past was often followed by a moral obligation: that of continuing the “glorious” work of “our” ancestors, by building on their achievements or following their vision and ideals, as was seen in Filakismenos’ comment. In the following comment, Margarita expressed this idea:

Under such a condition, is it possible that Greece shows pettiness? Greece, a country that is proud of its civilization throughout centuries, is it possible to ignore the weak that ask for its help? When ancient Greeks had as a supreme value, virtue (as an expression of morality and honesty) is it possible that we prove so “small” in relation to our ancestors? This is something I do not want to even think about. (Ioannidou Margarita)

In her comment Margarita referred vaguely to the country’s past in order to support citizenship rights for migrants, whom she presented as “the weak who ask for help.” By presenting migrants as people who are in need of help, she attempts to evoke values of solidarity and help toward others. With her rhetorical question, she sets off to argue that because Greece has such a glorious

<sup>8</sup> The phrase is *Whoever is not Greek is barbarian*. It is a phrase that, in lay knowledge, is attributed to various figures of the historical past, but none of those attributions has been confirmed.

past (i.e., “Greece, a country that is proud of its civilization throughout centuries”) denying citizenship rights would imply pettiness, something that she presents as completely incompatible with Greeks’ values: virtue, morality, honesty. What Margarita suggested is that modern Greeks have a moral obligation to continue exemplifying the values of their ancestors throughout the centuries. These ideas are reminiscent of constructions of Western humanitarian values commonly employed in asylum debates (Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2014; Every, 2008).

In the following comment, Alexis Dimitriou also expressed this sense of moral obligation to pursue the opposite argument: that of denying citizenship rights to migrants. He brought in a series of different important historical figures of the national past in the following:

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HOW ARE YOU GOING TO FACE SOCRATES, LEONIDAS, KOLOKOTRONIS, KARAIKAKIS<sup>9</sup> AND ALL THESE? SHAME ON YOU RESIDENTS OF ARGOS. . . . THE DAY WILL COME. (Alexis Dimitriou)

Alexis Dimitriou refers to a philosopher and three war heroes, all admirable figures of different eras of the Greek history. All these figures are evoked by the commentator in order to induce shame on those supporting the legislation, evident in his rhetorical question: “How are you going to face . . . ?” The reason why the supporters should feel shame is left unexplained. Implicitly it is suggested that it is because supporters disregard the important work or the sacrifice of these figures. Namely, by supporting citizenship rights for migrants, they put the nation and its admirable aspects at stake. In the rest of the comment, Alexis brought out two well-known phrases, coming from different contexts. The first, *Shame on you residents of Argos*, attributed to Homer’s *Iliad*, is taken from a war context, possibly drawing parallels between the current situation and war. *The day will come* is a phrase attributed to Pythia, from the *Oracle of Delphi*, and it probably alludes to the dark future that is awaiting Greeks if they grant citizenship to migrants. By using these historical quotes, Alexis makes the past relevant to the present. He thus rejects citizenship rights through inducing a sense of shame toward those who attempt, in his view, to disrespect the nation’s past through supporting the legislation.

Implicitly, granting citizenship rights is paralleled to a war condition that threatens the sovereignty of the nation.

Overall, these comments show that participants may use the idea of moral obligation toward the past flexibly. The main idea is to continue the glorious achievements and ideals of Greek ancestors in general and heroic figures in particular. But this idea can be mobilized in different ways: to advocate granting citizenship rights to migrants, and thus exhibit the “Greek virtue” of caring for the weak, or to suggest denying citizenship rights in order to preserve the nation’s integrity.

## Heterogeneity and Homogeneity

A final key theme in representations of Greek history in our data was the oppositional theme of national homogeneity–heterogeneity. There were commentators who presented the nation as having always been a homogeneous entity sharing the same characteristics, comprised of people who have always been “purely” Greek, direct ancestors of the ancient Greeks. This idea concurs with findings regarding representations of Greek history as homogeneous and free of foreign influence in Greek history schoolbooks (Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997). There were, however, commentators who presented the nation as a heterogeneous entity, being comprised of people with different ethnic origins, who have been part of the national group at different historical eras. Whereas the idea of homogeneity was used to argue against granting citizenship rights to migrants, heterogeneity was used for the opposite reason. However, as we show, some commentators used ideas of both homogeneity and heterogeneity of the nation in their arguments, creating a complex and dilemmatic representation (Billig, 1987) of the past.

Ilias referred to homogeneity of the nation in terms of shared characteristics in the following comment:

It isn’t anybody that can be Greek and of course foreigners cannot be because they do not have anything in common with regard to our culture, and nation. Ancient Greeks have the following characteristics:

<sup>9</sup> Socrates: ancient Greek philosopher; Leonidas: heroic figure of the Greek-Persian War; Kolokotronis and Karaiskakis: fought during the war of independence from Turkish occupation.

“Same blooded, same language, same ways of being, same religion.” You tell me, which of the following characteristics does a foreigner with 5 years of residence in Greece have? (Ilias)

In order to reject inclusion of migrants to citizenship, Ilias made a point regarding national homogeneity. Greeks share the same biological (i.e., blood), cultural, linguistic, religious, and behavioral characteristics. His idea is legitimized through the use of a quote by the historian Herodotus. The terms *Greeks* and *ancient Greeks* are used interchangeably here, indicating that both groups are unproblematically taken as the same ingroup against the migrant outgroup. Thus, modern Greeks are descendants of ancient Greeks, with which they share the same characteristics and which are incompatible with migrants’ characteristics. As it has been argued (Chryssochoou & Lyons, 2011), dominant perceptions of cultural incompatibility restrict the accessibility of the national identity for ethnic minorities and limit their capacity to participate in society.

Whereas Ilias clearly expressed ideas about homogeneity, in the next comment, oppositional ideas of homogeneity and heterogeneity are both put forward.

Greece has so far assimilated dozens of cultures (Illyrians, Thracians, Franks, Spanish, Iberians, Romans, Vandals, Goths, Turkmenians, etc.). Contemporary Greeks carry both culturally and “hematologically” (if anybody accepts this theory) the load of dozens of populations. Indeed dozens. (Why I wonder do we use the polite plural, it didn’t exist in ancient Greek. Does anybody know that in Greece there was a 200 year Kingdom of Spanish created and that during the 30’s decade there was a Kingdom of Vlachs in Pindos?) Greece was never culturally homogeneous, with the exception of the last 90 years. Contemporary migrants will give birth to grandchildren whose descent will be a distant memory. Because this is how it should be. (Aleksandros Benizelos)

Aleksandros cited a series of ethnic groups that he claims have been assimilated by the Greek nation and whose cultural characteristics have become part of the Greek population. Note here that the existence of the Greek nation itself is not questioned, and its capacity to assimilate characteristics of other groups is emphasized—in other words, there is no equal exchange between the ethnic groups (see similar ideas in Greek history education in Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997). A double reference to the word *dozens* works as an

extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) that is used to support the argument of cultural heterogeneity. This idea is also further supported by the reference to the two kingdoms, which Aleksandros brought in as possibly unknown facts to the readers, showing competence in historical knowledge that legitimizes his claims. It is interesting that the idea of the biological basis of ethnicity (“hematologically”) is brought in but held at some distance (“if anybody accepts this theory”) in order to suggest that he himself does not subscribe to such an unfounded theory. Interestingly, Aleksandros concluded by arguing that the Greek nation has been homogeneous in the last 90 years,<sup>10</sup> thus contradicting his earlier argument.

This tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity was present in other comments, too, with some commentators presenting the Greek nation as heterogeneous while also making claims about its partial homogeneity at some point in time or some part of the population. Thus, participants who questioned the idea of the homogeneity of the nation as a myth or as obsolete did not entirely question the possibility of the existence of “pure” Greeks (e.g., arguing that 70% of the population has a multiethnic genetic inheritance or that there are only a few thousand who are “pure”). This tension is an interesting finding also identified by Condor (2006) in English participants’ discourse. We argue that constructions of the Greek nation as homogeneous and constructions of the nation as heterogeneous were both based on the assumption that there is such a thing as Greek ethnicity that is based on a common genetic heritage. For some commentators, this common genetic heritage was seen as having been diluted though interactions with foreign populations, whereas for other commentators it was seen as still present today. In other words, in both the theme of homogeneity and the countertheme of heterogeneity there are banal assumptions (Billig, 1995) about the

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<sup>10</sup> The commentator possibly refers here to the end of the Greco-Turkish War, when, during the population exchange, Greek Orthodox citizens of Turkey living in Smyrna were transferred to mainland Greece, something that is presented in other comments, too, as the last recorded event of ethnic mixing.



continuity of the nation, its partial homogeneity, and the biological basis of ethnicity, which could potentially act in exclusive ways to migrants and their rights, as we discuss in more detail in the next section.

### History as a Resource in Citizenship Debates: Synthesis and Implications

Concerns over citizenship are central in today's debates concerning migration in Europe. In debates over migrants' citizenship, history appears to be a key concern. Across many Western states, some knowledge of national history has become a requisite for naturalizing as a citizen. This is usually assessed via the so-called citizenship tests that are increasingly part and parcel of naturalization procedures. Social psychological research has only recently turned the attention to how citizens themselves understand and construct citizenship rights, through a qualitative approach. This body of research has emphasized the important implications of this lay perspective and qualitative approach to understanding identity and the politics of inclusion or exclusion in migrant and indigenous relations ([Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2014](#); [Gibson & Hamilton, 2011](#); [Gray & Griffin, 2014](#); [Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015](#)).

Following this emerging trend for the qualitative social psychological study of citizenship, in this article we explored the connections between representations of national history and representations of citizenship, in order to shed light to the complexities of lay thinking about citizenship. Our focus has been Greece, where, due to a general romanticization of Greece's historical heritage, the idea of national history is a significant symbolic resource that feeds into representations of national identity (e.g., [Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997](#); [Triandafyllidou & Veikou, 2002](#); [Tzanelli, 2006](#)).

So far, existing experimental research has confirmed that representations of history are associated with people's attitudes toward migrants (e.g., [Jetten & Wohl, 2012](#); [Sibley et al., 2008](#); [Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014](#); [Smeekes et al., 2012](#)) but has not shown how different contents of historical narratives may be mobilized and flexibly used to argue about a controversial social issue, such as citizenship, in a naturalistic setting.

In this research we opted for a qualitative approach guided by the theory of social representations in order to examine how people use history to formulate understandings about citizenship rights. This approach permitted us to unravel the complex and dilemmatic nature of people's thought ([Billig, 1987](#); [Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2015](#)), evident for example in the fact that people hold simultaneously oppositional ideas about the nation's past and that they may draw upon the same idea to suggest both inclusion and exclusion of migrants from citizenship rights. Our approach permitted, beyond the content of representations, examination of their political dimensions, the "what for" ([Jovchelovitch, 2007](#)), and their use and function in actual debates, or what [Gibson \(2015, p. 217\)](#) called "history in action."

We identified four themes concerning the ways that national history is represented to formulate arguments about citizenship rights and boundaries in our data: continuity of the nation, idealization of the past, moral obligation toward the past and homogeneity or heterogeneity of the nation. Ideas about continuity of the nation serve to establish an ethnic and essentialist idea of national belonging, according to which citizenship is an exclusive right of "pure" Greeks, who are connected across the centuries through blood, and thus cannot be granted to migrants ([Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2015](#)). Ideas about homogeneity of the nation concur with this essentialist view: The Greek nation is presented as free from interethnic mixing, and thus today's Greeks are presented as direct descendants of the ancient Greeks. Idealization of the past and moral obligation are related themes that express pride toward the nation's past and obligation toward continuation of the glorious past of the country. Using the past as a template for the present may inhibit consideration of social change, such as mutual integration of Greeks and migrants into a more plural society.

However, we showed that some ideas about the nation's past are used flexibly to suggest both exclusion and inclusion of migrants. Moral obligation to uphold Greek ancestors' virtue of hospitality served to argue in favor of inclusion of migrants. However, this argument was based on a representation of migrants as the "weak who ask for help," reflecting a paternalistic attitude and assuming an asymmetrical relationship between the "weak" and the "strong," or

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between “victims” and “saviors.” On the other hand, supporting migrants’ rights was also based on the argument that the Greek nation is or has been heterogeneous, and therefore migrants pose no threat to national “purity.” Although this idea seemingly challenged the essentialist idea of homogeneity, we showed that it was based on an implicit essentialist view of Greek ethnicity and on the assumption that migrant groups should be assimilated in Greece, rather than participate in a mutual cultural exchange.

Thus, even in cases of a more critical evaluation of history that seemingly challenges master narratives of the past, the banal assumptions that nations are distinct, continuous, historically rooted entities comprised of people sharing a genetic background are preserved. This highlights the difficulty in constructing counternarratives of the nation that are more plural and inclusive. The production of these narratives is further inhibited by ideas of pride and admiration toward the country’s historical trajectory, which in some cases reveal a belief in the national superiority of Greece over other nations. It is in this light, then, that migrants are portrayed as inferior or powerless or as a threat to national sovereignty, rendering their inclusion problematic.

Broadly, this idealization and romanticization of the past leaves no room for a more critical understanding that considers multiple perspectives and allows for a more contextual understanding of past events. This lack of critical understanding is further evident in the fact that historical events were represented as the truth in our data. They were, in other words, objectified constructions that left little room for considering alternative versions of the past. Given the belief in continuity between past and future (Sani et al., 2008), this way of representing national history narrows the scope of possible futures. It is a teleological representation that leaves the past unquestioned and predetermines the form that the future can take.

Through our analysis we showed that history does indeed become relevant when thinking and arguing about citizenship. It becomes a resource that defines who is a “true” national and demarcates the boundaries of citizenship, it specifies actions that citizens should take, and it sets the grounds for intergroup relations. In our context, historical ideas were used as a resource to pro-

mote a rather assimilatory, exclusive, and even xenophobic position toward migrants. Related ideas are found in formal and informal educational forums. Indeed, ideas about continuity, homogeneity, pride, and superiority expressed in the comments have been identified in history textbooks in Greece (Fragoudaki & Dragona, 1997).

There are political implications that can be drawn from our findings. What is at stake in the debates around this citizenship law is not just that migrants are symbolically excluded from a narrow hegemonic idea of Greekness. With exclusion from the nation-state also comes exclusion from a set of tangible rights and benefits associated with the position of the citizen. Considering the ideological functions of these historical representations, it can be said that on the one hand, they maintain an ethnic conception of Greekness, and on the other hand, they block the socioeconomic mobility of migrants, thus securing existing class hierarchies where migrants are second-class citizens. These denizens, or “metics” as one of the earlier commentators put it, using the example of the ancient Athenian polity, have duties and are obliged to pay into the state but do not enjoy full rights as citizens. These issues are evident in citizenship debates across the Western world, where assessing migrants’ economic contribution has become possibly the most important naturalization criterion following length of residency. We thus encourage research that examines how history is presented in formal and informal settings. Such research should investigate what the implications of these representations are for civic life and action with a view of promoting a more reflective and critical understanding of the past that inhibits xenophobia and racism in the present and future.

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